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9. A HERONRY AT TRAJ IN KHEDA DISTRICT, GUJARAT

Kheda district is reckoned to be among the important bird areas of Gujarat, notable for its expanse of inland wetlands. Besides having a high density of sarus crane *Grus antigone* (Singh and Tatu 2000) this area also holds many heronries, such as at Traj and Pandoli village ponds (A.J. Urfi & Dilhaz Jaffrey, unpubl. data). In this note, I record the Traj heronry, which was studied during June-October, 1999, in some detail.

The village pond at Traj, estimated to be over 10 acres, is approximately 20 km from National Highway No. 8, between Ahmedabad and Kheda. Since the pond is fed by a canal, there is water all year round. In this regard, it is different from many other village ponds in Gujarat, which dry up during the summer and are replenished only during the monsoon. Traj pond is bisected into two interconnected halves by a low-lying bund wall. One part is shallow and overgrown by the Indian lotus (*Nelumbo*

nucifera), while the other is deeper and has a small island with several *Acacia* and *Ficus* trees.

On our first visit to Traj on June 15, we observed that about 200 Asian openbill-stork (*Anastomus oscitans*) had collected on the trees on the island, along with the little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and little cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*). On a second visit on June 21, the nesting of these species was confirmed and on July 14, new breeding species Oriental white ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) and median egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) were observed to have also joined the heronry. Even at this stage, the openbill-stork were seen flying about on nest building chores, such as collecting fresh leafy twigs to add to their nests. On the fourth visit on August 28, chicks of Asian openbill-stork, white ibis, median egret and cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) were observed. One darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) and 4 painted stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) were also observed, leading us to

suspect that these species would nest here at an appropriate time. However, these birds were not seen again during a trip on October 7. By now, the chicks of all heronry birds had reached subadult proportions. Since the island is some distance away from the bund walls surrounding the pond from which observations can be made, it was not possible to ascertain the number of nests of each species on any occasion.

Other than the heronry, the wildlife value of Traj village pond has some other aspects too. On most of our visits we encountered quite high numbers of sarus crane, 68 in the shallow part of Traj pond on July 14 being the highest number. Other types of waterbirds viz, rails, kingfisher, ducks etc. were also seen here. Another interesting feature is the presence of mugger (*Crocodylus palustris*) in the deep part of the Traj pond (Vijaykumar 1997). On our visits five mugger were observed, of which three were large specimens (c. 3m) and two smaller individuals

(1.2-3m). However, we did not come across any instance of mugger predated on adult or juvenile birds of the heronry.

For ornithologically significant village ponds in the Ahmedabad region, a conservation and education strategy has been chalked out by Urfi and Nareshwar (1998). This plan envisages population monitoring of heronry birds and simple interpretation and community sensitization programs.

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10. INTERACTION BETWEEN SIBERIAN CRANE *GRUS LEUCOGERANUS* AND CHECKERED KEELBACK SNAKE *XENOCHROPHIS PISCATOR* IN KEOLADEO NATIONAL PARK, BHARATPUR

On July 1, 1997 while collecting information on the time budget and activity patterns of four released Siberian cranes *Grus leucogeranus* in the Keoladeo National Park, I noticed a crane hurriedly pacing up and down a distance of c. 10 m. Through my telescope I noticed a checkered keelback water snake *Xenochrophis piscator* holding on to the crane's face. The one metre long water snake had wrapped itself around the crane's neck. The crane tried hard to shake the snake off her face. She tried removing it by vigorously shaking her head and neck, and also with her feet. Three other cranes

foraging nearby stopped feeding and looked nervously at the affected crane that struggled for more than ten minutes, before the snake loosened its grip and dropped off. After the snake had left, the crane splashed water on her face and neck for some time and started preening. The other cranes also resumed their activities.

In 1996-97, the water hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* had choked most of the marshes in the Park because of which water snakes had become abundant. The Park Management was getting the hyacinth removed manually as part of the Park's